

## Letter to the Editor

## Home-visit medical care for COVID-19 patients

Dear Editor,

As the number of patients with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is increasing in Japan, we are facing a shortage of inpatient beds. Thus, the patients with mild symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, or fatigue) are asked to stay at home. However, if their health deteriorates, it becomes difficult to monitor their condition and decide on when to transfer them to a hospital, especially at night.<sup>1</sup> To prevent unexpected deterioration, we have started home-visit medical care for COVID-19 patients from April 2020. The home-visit medical care team is composed of a doctor and several staff members of the regional public health-care center. A staff member calls each patient daily; based on the patient's condition, the home-visit medical care team prioritizes the most serious patients for early visit and arranges the visiting order for the day accordingly. The home-visit medical care team visits each patient's home to check the current medical condition. If the patient needs hospitalization due to deteriorating vital signs and requires oxygen, the regional public health-care center immediately arranges with a hospital that has an available bed and facilities to treat the patient.

This home-visit medical care not only prevents health emergencies, but also makes it easy to find a suitable hospital for the patients, because the patients are transported during daytime. The home-visit medical care team also provides precise information about the disease and counsels the patients and families about their concerns regarding the patient's daily care, possibility of transmission within the household, and mental stress.<sup>2</sup> To address these concerns, we have also composed and distributed documents containing essential information about COVID-19.

Because the occupancy of hospital beds for COVID-19 patients in Chiba prefecture is now over 200%, more than half of the patients remain at home.<sup>3</sup> We need to provide care to these patients, in addition to the ones who are hospitalized. Patients at home need social support, the same as inpatients, as they tend to be socially isolated.

The patients staying at home are sometimes isolated within even the family. Appropriate separation needs to be clearly distinguished from unnecessary and unethical isolation.<sup>4</sup> Providing correct information and instructions is another important role of home-visit medical care to prevent consequent deprivation and negligence. Additionally, the

home-visit care team wearing personal protective equipment may look strange to the neighbors, and the team must be considerate about this. Home-visit medical care is an effective strategy to avoid the collapse of the regional healthcare system and to maintain the health of the residents with limited resources, in COVID-19 hotspots.

## DISCLOSURE



Approval of the research protocol: N/A.

Informed consent: N/A.

Registry and registration no. of the study/trial: N/A.

Animal studies: N/A.

Conflict of interest: None.

Ayami Shigeno,<sup>1</sup> Hiroko Fukuda,<sup>2</sup> Yosuke Homma,<sup>1</sup>   
 Michiko Mizobe,<sup>1,3</sup> Ririko Yamagata,<sup>1</sup> Shun Tanaka,<sup>1</sup>  
 Kei Takehara,<sup>1</sup> Takaaki Saito,<sup>3</sup> and Hiraku Funakoshi<sup>1,3</sup>   
<sup>1</sup>Department of Emergency and Critical Care Medicine,  
 Tokyo Bay Urayasu Ichikawa Medical Center, Urayasu,  
<sup>2</sup>Ichikawa Regional Public Health Care Center, Ichikawa,  
 and <sup>3</sup>Department of Disaster Management, Tokyo Bay  
 Urayasu Ichikawa Medical Center, Urayasu, Japan  
 E-mail: shige.aya@gmail.com

## REFERENCES

- 1 Huang C, Wang Y, Li X, *et al.* Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China. *Lancet*. 2020; 395: 497–506.
- 2 Wang Z, Ma W, Zheng X, Wu G, Zhang R. Household transmission of SARS-CoV-2. *J Infect*. 2020; 81: 179–82.
- 3 Outbreaks of new coronavirus infections in Chiba prefecture. Disease control division, Health and welfare department, Chiba prefecture. [cited 14 April 2020] Available from: <https://www.pref.chiba.lg.jp/shippei/press/2019/documents/0414kansensya.pdf>.
- 4 Ethical considerations for patients, families and medical staff during an epidemic of new coronavirus infection. National Center for Global Health and Medicine, Disease Control and Prevention Center. [cited 14 April 2020]. Available from: [http://dcc.ncgm.go.jp/core/pdf/20200221\\_1.pdf](http://dcc.ncgm.go.jp/core/pdf/20200221_1.pdf).